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Developments in Guinea-Bissau and the activities of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 2404 (2018), by which the Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS) until 28 February 2019, and requested that I report every six months on the situation in Guinea-Bissau and on progress made in the implementation of the resolution and the mandate of UNIOGBIS. The report also provides an update on key political, security, human rights, socioeconomic and humanitarian developments in Guinea-Bissau since my report of 9 February 2018 (S/2018/110).

2. On 4 May, I announced the appointment of José Viegas Filho of Brazil as my new Special Representative for Guinea-Bissau and Head of UNIOGBIS, to succeed Modibo Touré of Mali, who completed his assignment on 6 May. My new Special Representative took up his functions in Bissau on 28 May.

II. Major developments

A. Political situation

3. Since my previous report, there have been some encouraging signs of progress towards the resolution of the political impasse in Guinea-Bissau and the implementation of the Conakry Agreement on the Implementation of the ECOWAS Road Map for the Resolution of the Political Crisis in Guinea-Bissau. Following local facilitation efforts led by national religious figures, and acceding to pressure from leaders of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), President José Mário Vaz finally appointed Aristides Gomes as Prime Minister of consensus, which led to the formation of an inclusive Government and the reconvening of the National Assembly in plenary session. Moreover, President Vaz formally set 18 November 2018 as the date of legislative elections. Notwithstanding those positive developments, the consensus among political actors remains fragile, and the process of organizing legislative elections in 2018 is facing serious technical and financial challenges. Since taking office in May, the inclusive Government of Prime Minister

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Gomes has delayed making important decisions on voter registration modalities, which has had repercussions for the timely procurement of biometric equipment to capture voter data. The indecisiveness of the new Government has cast doubt on its resolve to respect the timetable for the legislative elections to be held in November.

4. The ECOWAS decision, on 4 February, to impose sanctions on 19 Bissau-Guineans for impeding the implementation of the Conakry Agreement of 14 October 2016 faced limited public opposition, except from those concerned. On 13 February, the previous Government issued a statement describing the sanctions as "abusive", in conflict with the governing principles of ECOWAS and detrimental to the Constitution and laws of Guinea-Bissau. The statement further declared that the Government would call for an extraordinary session of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government to review the Conakry Agreement and to seek the appointment of a "new, independent and impartial mediator" interested in assisting Guinea-Bissau in overcoming the political stalemate.

5. On 20 February, a lawyer representing the 19 individuals on the ECOWAS sanctions list submitted a petition to the Chairperson of the ECOWAS Authority, President Faure Essozimna Gnassingbé of Togo, requesting the suspension of sanctions on procedural and substantive grounds. The petition cited lack of clarity and consistency in the application of sanctions and argued that the individuals sanctioned could not be held accountable for the non-implementation of the Conakry Agreement.

6. On 28 February, the Security Council adopted resolution 2404 (2018), by which it extended the mandate of UNIOGBIS for another year, from 1 March 2018 to 28 February 2019. In the resolution, the Council's identified three priorities for UNIOGBIS support, namely, the full implementation of the Conakry Agreement, the electoral process to ensure legislative elections in 2018, and the review of the Constitution of Guinea-Bissau. In an important departure from previous resolutions, the Council dropped all rule-of-law and security institutions tasks from the mandate of UNIOGBIS. The Council acknowledged the ECOWAS Authority's directive to the President of the ECOWAS Commission to implement sanctions against any person or organization impeding the process to end the crisis in Guinea-Bissau and noted the Authority's strong appeal to the African Union, the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries, the European Union and the United Nations to support ECOWAS in the effective implementation of the sanctions.

7. On 4 March, members of the Movement of Conscientious and Non-Conformist Citizens (Movimento dos Cidadãos Conscientes e Inconformados) held a peaceful march towards the ECOWAS mission in Bissau, calling for the full application of sanctions against individuals obstructing the implementation of the Conakry Agreement. The organizers handed a petition to the ECOWAS representative requesting that President Vaz be added to the sanctions list.

8. During the reporting period, the organization of legislative and presidential elections became the most challenging and pressing task for the Government. On 26 February, the acting president of the National Electoral Commission, José Pedro Sambú, advised President Vaz that it would not be technically feasible to hold elections in May, at the end of the four-year legislative term, as required by the Constitution. On 27 February, Mr. Sambú announced a revised timeline for the legislative elections, postponing the polls until 18 November. According to the National Electoral Commission, the new date was more realistic in view of the technical hurdles to be overcome and the short lead time available to complete a voter registration update.

9. Under the Constitution and the national electoral law, the President is required to set the date of presidential and legislative elections by decree, following

consultations with the Government, political parties and the National Electoral Commission. To that end, on 28 February and 1 March, President Vaz met with representatives of 40 of the country's registered political parties to agree on a possible date. In the meetings, the leaders of the two largest parties, the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cabo Verde (Partido Africano para a Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde — PAIGC) and the Party of Social Renewal (Partido da Renovação Social — PRS), demanded that elections be held in 2018 in accordance with the relevant constitutional provisions and electoral laws. There was widespread speculation that the ulterior motive of President Vaz was to hold legislative and presidential elections simultaneously in 2019, as he had announced to his peers at the ordinary session of the ECOWAS Authority on 16 December 2017. In that context, the leader of the United People's Assembly — Democratic Party of Guinea-Bissau (Assembleia do Povo Unido — Partido Democrático da Guiné-Bissau), Nuno Nabiam, denounced the lengthy consultative process as a deliberate manoeuvre by the President to delay the electoral process.

10. On 9 March, the Government and the United Nations signed onto a joint project, to be managed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) through a basket fund established for donor contributions, to support the national authorities in organizing the legislative elections. Developed by UNDP over six months in close consultation with the Government and the European Union, the budget of the project is $7.7 million. At the signing ceremony, the Government confirmed its contribution of $1 million, an unprecedented investment of State funds in elections. The Government later announced a further $800,000 to supplement its initial contribution.

11. As the then Prime Minister Artur Da Silva struggled to form an inclusive Government, President Vaz convened a meeting on 14 March to hold consultations with key political actors, civil society organizations and the group of five international partners represented in Guinea-Bissau — the African Union, the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries, ECOWAS, the European Union and the United Nations. The President reiterated his commitment to and support for legislative elections in 2018 and regretted the lack of progress in finding a solution to the political and institutional stalemate. Absent from the session were PAIGC and its ally, the Collective of Democratic Political Parties United against the Dictatorship (Coletivo de Partidos Políticos Democráticos Unidos Contra a Ditadura), which held a joint press conference on the same day denouncing any attempt by President Vaz to work outside the framework of the Conakry Agreement to overcome the impasse. The President of the National Assembly also declined to participate in the meeting.

12. On 29 March, the Peace and Security Council of the African Union issued a communiqué emphasizing that the Conakry Agreement remained the primary framework for the resolution of the political impasse in Guinea-Bissau and calling upon national actors to abide by their commitments and to ensure the full implementation of the ECOWAS road map and the Conakry Agreement. The Council stressed that the sanctions imposed by ECOWAS should remain in force until the full implementation of the Agreement, and requested ECOWAS to develop a mechanism to ensure that the sanctions worked effectively. The Council also called upon the Bissau-Guinean authorities to respect the Constitution with regard to the legislative and presidential elections scheduled for 2018 and 2019. Finally, the Council appealed to international partners to provide the financial support necessary to enable the extension of the mandate of the ECOWAS mission in Guinea-Bissau (ECOMIB).

13. Meanwhile, in Bissau, intense consultations facilitated by traditional and religious leaders in March and April, under the aegis of the Catholic bishop of Bissau, resulted in a rapprochement between PAIGC and PRS. On the basis of an agreement on principles, the two parties agreed on the naming of a Prime Minister of consensus and pledged to participate in an extraordinary session of the National Assembly to

elect the new members of the National Electoral Commission and to extend the current legislature until the November elections. On 9 April, in a meeting with the group of five international partners in Bissau, the President of the National Assembly indicated that he could only consider a request for the body to reconvene if the terms of the Conakry Agreement were fulfilled, starting with the appointment of a Prime Minister of consensus.

14. An ECOWAS ministerial delegation dispatched to Bissau on 11 April, led by the President of the ECOWAS Council of Ministers and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Togo, Robert Dussey, noted the rapprochement between PAIGC and PRS. In a communiqué issued at the end of the visit, the delegation welcomed the willingness of the two main political parties to work together to find a solution to the political impasse.

15. On 14 April, at its summit in Lomé, the ECOWAS Authority took positive note of the decisions by President Vaz to appoint a Prime Minister of consensus and to announce a date for legislative elections. The Authority also noted the decision by the Bissau-Guinean political actors to hold an extraordinary session of the National Assembly to elect the members of the National Electoral Commission and to extend the current legislature. The Authority further authorized the extension of the ECOMIB presence until 30 June.

16. On 16 April, upon his return to Bissau from an extraordinary summit of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS, President Vaz issued decrees to dismiss Prime Minister Da Silva and appoint Aristides Gomes as Prime Minister of consensus, and to set 18 November 2018 as the date for legislative elections. Prime Minister Gomes was sworn in on the same day. In reaction to those developments, a group of 15 parliamentarians that had been expelled from PAIGC called for the lifting of the ECOWAS sanctions.

17. On 19 April, the National Assembly met in a plenary session for the first time since December 2015. José Pedro Sambú, who had been serving as acting president of the National Electoral Commission, was elected to the post with 93 votes in favour, 1 abstention and 8 absentees. The National Assembly also adopted a bill to amend the Constitution, exceptionally extending the legislature beyond its four-year mandate, until November 2018. The following day, the Bissau-Guinean League of Human Rights (Liga Guineense dos Direitos Humanos) denounced the extension of the current legislature as unconstitutional.

18. An ECOWAS ministerial-level delegation, comprising the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Togo and the Minister of State and Secretary-General of the Presidency of Guinea, visited Bissau on 24 April to follow up on the formation of an inclusive Government. The delegation met with President Vaz, Prime Minister Gomes, the leaders of PAIGC and PRS, the Catholic bishop of Bissau and representatives of the group of five international partners in Bissau.

19. On 25 April, President Vaz issued a decree appointing the 26 members of the new Government, which comprised representatives of the political parties with seats in the National Assembly, the group of 15 parliamentarians that had been expelled from PAIGC and members of the Office of the President. In his statement at the swearing-in ceremony the next day, the President emphasized that the Prime Minister's main responsibility was to prepare for the holding of legislative elections on 18 November. Prime Minister Gomes remarked that his Government would strive to fully implement the Conakry Agreement and ensure that legislative elections were held on time. On 30 April, President Vaz appointed the former Minister of Interior, Botche Candé, who is featured on the list of individuals sanctioned by ECOWAS, as Minister of State and Adviser to the President on Defence, Internal and External Security Affairs.

20. On 6 June, Prime Minister Gomes presented a draft stability pact to the representatives of the group of five international partners in Bissau. He announced that the draft would be circulated to political parties for consultation. According to the Prime Minister, the stability pact would serve as the basis for the work of the inclusive Government in the period leading to the elections. To date, political parties have not officially reacted to the draft stability pact, which has yet to be submitted to a national round-table dialogue, as prescribed in the Conakry Agreement. Youth groups and the Council of Women have expressed concern over the lack of broader consultations.

21. The National Assembly adopted a new government programme and a State budget on 19 and 21 June, respectively. The budget was the first to be adopted since the dismissal of Prime Minister Domingos Simões Pereira in August 2015. It was set at $381 million, with a projected deficit of $78 million. The government programme focuses on electoral preparations.

22. Despite those positive developments, political rivalries between PAIGC and PRS re-surfaced. On 2 May, the Minister of Territorial Administration, Ester Fernandes, announced the suspension of eight regional governors, all of whom were perceived as being aligned with PRS. The PRS parliamentary leader denounced the measure as a violation of the agreement on principles reached between the two parties in March and April under the aegis of the Catholic bishop of Bissau. After weeks of consultations facilitated by ECOWAS, PRS recognized the prerogative of the PAIGC Minister to nominate regional governors. On 5 June, eight new regional governors and the mayor of Bissau, all close to PAIGC, were appointed.

23. Since June, the Government of Prime Minister Gomes has struggled to reach consensus on the modalities for the holding of elections. One particular stumbling block has been the procedure for the voter registration update, a prerequisite that should have begun in July, or 90 days before the November elections. The Prime Minister repeatedly invited political parties represented in the National Assembly to technical-level meetings to deliberate on options for the printing of voter registration cards, which resulted in politicized discussions on whether cards were to be printed at the site of registration, at a central printing location in Bissau, or abroad. UNDP electoral experts advised the Government against on-site printing owing to anticipated logistical hurdles associated with the transport of printing equipment across the country during the rainy season. Nevertheless, PRS continued to insist on the on-site printing option, while other parties showed flexibility towards the option of printing cards in Bissau and in the regional offices of the National Electoral Commission.

24. On 4 July, Braima Camará, the coordinator of the group of 15 parliamentarians that had been expelled from PAIGC, resigned from Parliament and broke away from PAIGC in anticipation of the formal establishment of his Movement for Democratic Alternation (Movimento de Alternância Democrática) as a new political party.

25. On 18 July, in the final declaration at their conference held at Santa Maria, Cabo Verde, the Heads of State and Government of the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries affirmed their readiness to provide electoral assistance and called upon international partners to materialize the financial pledges already made.

26. On 20 July, the Government issued a press release setting 23 August to 23 September as the period for voter registration and indicating that voter registration cards would be printed by the Technical Support Office for the Electoral Process in Bissau and the regional offices of the National Electoral Commission. The Government also reaffirmed its determination to hold legislative elections on 18 November.

27. On 31 July, in the final communiqué of its summit held in Lomé, the ECOWAS Authority urged Bissau-Guinean political stakeholders and civil society to continue to demonstrate their commitment to adhering to the date of 18 November 2018 for the holding of legislative elections; expressed its concern over the slow pace of implementation of the timetable for legislative elections; and appealed to the international community to support Guinea-Bissau. It noted a financial contribution of $1 million by the West African Economic and Monetary Union for the electoral preparations and decided to contribute $2 million. The Authority welcomed the progress made since the ECOWAS summit of 14 April and also decided to lift the targeted sanctions imposed on 4 February against 19 stakeholders.

B. Security situation

28. Overall, the security situation in Guinea-Bissau has remained calm. Street protests have decreased since the appointment of the new Government. However, common crime, notably robberies and theft, reportedly increased. Reports also indicate an increase in illicit cross-border activities, especially along the northern frontier with Senegal.

29. During the reporting period, the armed forces remained neutral, under strong leadership, and continued to refrain from interfering in political affairs.

C. Human rights situation

30. The human rights situation remained largely unchanged. The respect, protection and fulfilment of human rights have been hampered by weak State institutions and continued political instability. The country has yet to take additional steps to establish an independent national human rights commission, in line with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (Paris Principles), and the current national human rights mechanism continues to work under State supervision and guidance.

31. No significant progress was made to investigate human rights violations, especially those associated with past military coups and associated violence. On 20 March, a group of barristers denounced cases of arbitrary detention and corruption, allegedly perpetrated by prosecutors, and announced the creation of an association to fight corruption and human rights violations in the justice system. On 23 April, the ECOWAS Court of Justice held a hearing in Bamako in relation to allegations, lodged on 5 December 2016, of excessive use of force and suppression of the right to peaceful demonstration in Guinea-Bissau; the final decision is due on 16 October 2018.

32. A reversal of the previously reported tendency to restrict political participation and the right of peaceful assembly was registered during the reporting period. Civil society organizations held a series of peaceful marches and vigils in Bissau without reported incidents. Strikes also occurred without significant disturbances. Workers assigned to the Judiciary Police went on strike in February, and the National Union of Workers of Guinea-Bissau (União Nacional dos Trabalhadores da Guiné-Bissau) declared general strikes by public workers from 7 to 9 May, 12 to 14 June and 26 to 28 June, claiming salary arrears and readjustments, along with pensions for public servants.

D. Social, economic and humanitarian situation

33. The economic growth rate for Guinea-Bissau in 2018 is expected to reach 5.3 per cent, representing a generally positive outlook, albeit with lower growth than in 2016 or 2017. On 1 June, the International Monetary Fund approved a one-year extension of its extended credit facility to sustain macroeconomic stability during the upcoming election period and to support reforms focused on mobilizing revenue and addressing gaps in essential infrastructure. The extension released an additional $4.3 million, bringing the total amount disbursed under the extended credit facility to $24.2 million. Various international financial institutions and development banks, including the World Bank, have indicated that they are considering re-initiating budget support should the holding of legislative elections be successful and should a new Government be appointed.

34. There is growing concern that the 2018 cashew harvest, the country's single most important revenue earner, may decrease by up to 20 per cent compared to 2017, which recorded a harvest of approximately 200,000 metric tons. The anticipated poorer harvest is being attributed to adverse weather conditions and to fungal blight in some areas. In March, President Vaz set an inordinately high reference price for cashews, at 1,000 CFA francs (approximately $1.75) per kilogram, almost double the market price in the region. Farmers have since been reluctant to sell their product below the reference price and have been inclined to withhold it. While it is too early to predict the total volume of cashew exports for the year, there is concern that small-scale producers may face challenging economic times ahead.

35. A poorer cashew harvest and a lower volume of exports may also worsen the level of food insecurity in the next few months. Between February and May, approximately 210,000 people were forecast to become food insecure, including more than 25,000 who would require immediate food assistance. The country is likely to remain vulnerable to food insecurity, in particular in rural areas, if it remains exposed to political instability, the absence of effective food security policies, and a lack of diversification of subsistence and income-generating agriculture.

36. The provision of basic public services deteriorated in the reporting period, with national energy production capacity reduced by one third owing to the lack of sound management of the public utility company and financial difficulties on the part of the national treasury. The population of Bissau faced longer periods of electricity and water shortages. Energy supplies outside Bissau are among the lowest in West Africa, reaching only 4 per cent of rural towns. In addition, strike actions related to the inability of the Government to fulfil promises to meet demands for an increase in public sector wages have seriously affected the provision of schooling and medical services nationwide.

III. Status of implementation of the mandate of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau

A. Implementation of the Conakry Agreement, the ECOWAS road map, political dialogue and a national reconciliation process, and the strengthening of democratic governance, including through urgent reforms

37. In response to a significantly-revised mandate, UNIOGBIS prioritized engagement with national stakeholders to foster solutions to implement the Conakry

Agreement. My Special Representative maintained frequent contact with the President, the Prime Minister and his Cabinet, the President of the National Assembly, the President of the Supreme Court and the Chief of General Staff of the Armed Forces. He also liaised with leaders of political parties and civil society representatives, including women and youth groups.

38. My Special Representative continued to coordinate the group of five international partners in Bissau to help to address the political stalemate. In the month preceding the extraordinary summit of the ECOWAS Authority on 14 April, the group held consultations with key political actors, including the President on 16 March and the President of the National Assembly on 9 April, to stress that the Conakry Agreement remained the primary framework for resolving the political stalemate.

39. UNIOGBIS reinforced its cooperation with ECOWAS in support of the implementation of the Conakry Agreement, including by providing technical assistance in preparation for the extraordinary summit of 14 April. To ensure a coordinated approach, my Special Representative maintained regular contact with the Chairperson of the ECOWAS Authority, President Gnassingbé of Togo, and the ECOWAS Mediator for Guinea-Bissau, President Alpha Condé of Guinea.

40. To garner international support for the implementation of the Conakry Agreement, my Special Representative held bilateral consultations in Brussels, Lisbon and Paris from 26 February to 2 March, engaged with the International Organization of la Francophonie during an official visit to Bissau on 21 May, and participated in a summit of the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries held in Santa Maria, Cabo Verde, on 17 and 18 July.

41. UNIOGBIS also provided strategic and technical advice and support, as well as financial assistance from the Peacebuilding Fund, to the organizing commission of a national conference towards the consolidation of peace and development in Guinea-Bissau. In May, the commission held a series of meetings with key national stakeholders, including President Vaz and the President of the National Assembly, to formally present its report, entitled "In the Name of Peace" (Em Nome da Paz). The report presents the main findings and recommendations from nationwide consultations with more than 3,000 persons between 2009 and 2017 on the causes of conflict and instability in Guinea-Bissau. The presentations made to authorities at the meetings helped to reignite interest in the work of the commission and focused attention on the need for national reconciliation.

B. Timely conduct of legislative elections in 2018

42. My Special Representative, in close coordination with international partners, prioritized his good offices engagement with national actors with a view to making progress in preparing for the holding of legislative elections on 18 November. He consulted regularly with the Prime Minister, the President of the National Assembly, leaders of political parties and the president of the National Electoral Commission on the status of preparations for elections and associated challenges, including voter registration.

43. Meanwhile, UNIOGBIS and UNDP, in coordination with international partners, also emphasized the provision of support to the Government in making technical preparations and mobilizing resources for the elections. The electoral support project developed by UNDP and the European Union is strengthening the capacity of the National Electoral Commission and the Technical Support Office for the Electoral Process (in the Ministry of Territorial Administration) to update the voter registry, carry out a civic education campaign for voters and complete the remaining technical requirements for the opening of the polls. UNIOGBIS and the National Electoral

Commission have co-chaired regular meetings to brief the Government, political parties and international partners on the status of electoral preparations, including related resource requirements.

44. On 28 February, UNDP and the Technical Support Office for the Electoral Process delivered a training session in Bissau on voter registration to 267 people, including 40 women, who work for the voter registration regional commissions. The training strengthened the capacity of participants in the use of data collection techniques and tools and enhanced their understanding of the legal framework for nationwide voter registration.

45. In May, UNDP, with support from the European Union, assisted the Technical Support Office for the Electoral Process in defining the voter registration methodology and designing technical specifications for the voter registration equipment. UNDP is finalizing the procurement of voter registration equipment to support national authorities in preparing for the elections.

46. From 18 to 29 June, and from 9 to 28 July, UNIOGBIS facilitated the delivery of courses on electoral security and the prevention of violence, in Bissau, with support from the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre and sponsorship by Germany. A total of 95 members of Bissau-Guinean public security, law enforcement and defence institutions, including 17 women, participated in the training, which focused on early-warning mechanisms and nationwide joint command arrangements.

C. Review of the Constitution of Guinea-Bissau

47. Despite the formation of an inclusive Government and the resumption of the full functioning of the National Assembly, national stakeholders have displayed reluctance to take action on critical reform issues, including the review of the Constitution, before the holding of legislative elections.

48. In April, UNIOGBIS resumed engagement with the National Assembly's ad hoc commission on constitutional reform and is currently developing a plan to support the commission in implementing priority actions required for expediting the review of the Constitution. UNIOGBIS is also providing technical and financial support, with resources from the Peacebuilding Fund, to enhance the capacity of civil society organizations to contribute to consultations on the draft proposal for the revised Constitution to be prepared by the ad hoc commission.

D. Strengthening democratic institutions and enhancing the capacity of State organs

49. Between 9 May and 21 June, UNIOGBIS delivered five seminars on military leadership to more than 200 officers in the armed forces, 10 members of the National Defence Institute and 40 officers in the National Guard, including 20 women, to enhance their performance in command positions and raise awareness of the importance of respect by the military for constitutional prerogatives and the rule of law. On 1 June, UNIOGBIS replicated the seminars in a training session sponsored by the General Staff of the Armed Forces for 48 officers who expected to assume positions as political advisers to senior military commanders.

50. In support of a joint programme on police, justice and corrections under the United Nations global focal point arrangement, UNIOGBIS continued to co-locate personnel in justice and security institutions to enhance efficiency in the implementation of national strategies on public security, law enforcement and

judiciary and penitentiary management. Under a related access to justice project, UNDP handed over a new court house to authorities in Mansoa, in the Oio region.

E. Promotion and protection of human rights

51. UNIOGBIS continued to assist national authorities in the promotion and protection of human rights, by providing strategic advice, technical and financial support and by undertaking advocacy, capacity-building, awareness-raising and training activities. Assistance included the provision of technical advice to the Secretariat of State for Planning and Regional Integration in the mainstreaming of human rights into the ongoing alignment and integration of the country's strategic and operational plan, "Terra Ranka", with global development frameworks, including the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.

52. UNIOGBIS continued to assist the National Network of Human Rights Defenders by providing training in monitoring and protecting human rights, in particular during the electoral process. On 20 and 21 April, UNIOGBIS supported a retreat for Network members that focused on the establishment of early-warning and protection mechanisms. Improved capacity in those areas will enhance engagement between the Network and international human rights mechanisms, including the universal periodic review of the Human Rights Council and others.

53. On 7 April, UNIOGBIS contributed to a training session organized by the Bissau-Guinean League of Human Rights on freedom of assembly and peaceful demonstration. Thirty law enforcement officials, including 5 women, from the Rapid Intervention Police, the Public Order Police and the National Guard participated in the training. From 27 April to 1 May, UNIOGBIS organized a five-day human rights campaign involving hundreds of young people from Bissau and the Biombo, Cacheu and Gabu regions in the context of a citizenship-building initiative.

54. Since April, UNIOGBIS has been raising awareness among electoral stakeholders, including the staff of the regional offices of National Electoral Commission and the Technical Support Office for the Electoral Process, representatives of civil society organizations, local and religious leaders, persons with disabilities, media practitioners and technicians on their roles and responsibilities with respect to the promotion and protection of human rights in the electoral processes. Multi-stakeholder workshops on human rights in electoral processes were jointly organized by UNIOGBIS, UNDP, the National Electoral Commission and the Technical Support Office for the Electoral Process for a total of 245 participants, including 85 women, from Bissau and the Bolama, Cacheu, Oio and Quinara regions.

55. Assessments in Bafatá from 17 to 19 April, in Gabu from 23 to 26 April, and in Quinara from 8 to 10 May, showed that extreme poverty, unequal access to education, multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination affecting women and girls, as well as harmful traditional practices, including early and forced marriage, all limited the rights of women and youth to participate in economic life, which had a detrimental impact on their enjoyment of the right to participate in the public and political spheres.

56. On 5 July, UNIOGBIS initiated a series of briefings on human rights-related issues in the area of transitional justice and reconciliation with members of the organizing commission for the national conference towards the consolidation of peace and development in Guinea-Bissau. The briefings aimed to strengthen the capacity of members to understand the human rights implications of the various proposals for national reconciliation outlined by the organizing commission in its 2017 report.

F. Combating drug trafficking and transnational organized crime

57. Since my previous report, there have been modest signs of progress towards a national commitment to countering drug trafficking and transnational organized crime. On 4 April, a joint airport interdiction task force became operational at Bissau's international airport, in the framework of the Airport Communication Project of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) and the World Customs Organization. The Government assigned 15 officers from the Judicial Police, Customs, the National Guard, the Public Order Police and the National Central Bureau at INTERPOL to this nationally owned interservice structure. During UNODC-led on-the-job mentoring in profiling and targeting techniques, task force members arrested seven drug couriers and seized 6.9 kilograms of cocaine along the São Paulo-Lisbon-Bissau air route, which demonstrated the continued use of Guinea-Bissau as a transit country for cocaine trafficking from South America.

58. As part of the joint programme on police, justice and corrections, UNIOGBIS and UNODC provided training to the Judicial Police, the Public Order Police, the National Guard, the Financial Intelligence Unit, the Transnational Crime Unit and the joint airport interdiction task force, contributing to an increase in the number of meetings among those entities, improved planning of joint operations and increased sharing of timely information.

59. During the reporting period and pursuant to Security Council resolution 2404 (2018), UNODC increased its activities in Guinea-Bissau and, along with UNIOGBIS, supported the Government in expanding its capacity to operate in the regions through the establishment of Judicial Police outposts in Catió, in the Tombali region, and in the Bubaque islands, in the Bijagós archipelago of the Bolama region. The archipelago, with its 88 islands, exposes the country to criminal activities owing to the difficulties of controlling its vast territorial waters. In April, UNODC launched a new project in Guinea-Bissau aimed at enhancing national capacities and fostering stronger regional cooperation to detect and investigate cross-border organized crime in the Gambia, Guinea-Bissau and Senegal. In May, UNODC and France also conducted a joint assessment of how to enhance maritime security and the rule of law through a sustainable development perspective. In May, UNODC deployed to Bissau a senior law enforcement expert on trafficking in persons.

60. UNIOGBIS and UNODC also supported the reactivation of the Transnational Crime Unit, which had not been operational since February 2017. The Unit recommenced operations after the appointment, on 14 May, of a new director of the Judiciary Police, who prioritized the reassignment of Judiciary Police members to the Unit, who now constitute half the Unit's capacity. UNIOGBIS co-located police advisers to mentor their counterparts in the Transnational Crime Unit.

61. UNIOGBIS provided technical and financial support for the organizing of the second General Congress of Public Prosecutors, held on 23 and 24 May in Bissau. Discussions and recommendations focused on the role of magistrates and public prosecutors in the fight against corruption and impunity, notably with respect to drug trafficking and organized crime, and strategies to resist undue political and military influence. UNODC is also leading the finalization of an inter-agency strategy to take a cross-pillar approach to address the drug problem. That will encourage joint programming between entities to support national and regional authorities in the implementation of more balanced and people-centred policies that promote human rights, health and social rehabilitation alongside law enforcement efforts.

62. In a meeting with my Senior Adviser on Policy, Ana Maria Menéndez Perez, held in Bissau on 25 May, President Vaz requested increased support from the

international community to combat transnational organized crime, including drug and human trafficking. The President noted that illicit activities, including the involvement of elements of the armed forces, were affecting stability and democratic governance. In a meeting with UNODC and UNIOGBIS, on 4 June, the President reiterated those concerns and called upon UNODC to support the design and implementation of a national plan to tackle serious transnational organized crime, in cooperation with UNIOGBIS. The President indicated that he would quickly formalize his request for assistance in a letter to be sent to the Executive Director of UNODC. To date, UNODC has not yet received that letter.

63. On 9 July, UNIOGBIS launched a pilot community protection programme in Buba in Quinara region to improve prevention and to combat drug trafficking and transnational organized crime by fostering partnerships between State institutions and the population.

64. During the reporting period, UNIOGBIS and UNODC also provided training to 23 law enforcement officers on border control and mentored law enforcement counterparts in conducting human trafficking investigations. UNIOGBIS and the African Union provided technical support and mentoring in the installation and use of the Mobile INTERPOL Network Database at the border posts of Djegue (North), Pirada (Northeast) and Cuntabane (South), which resulted in enhanced border control.

G. Incorporating a gender perspective into peacebuilding

65. During the reporting period, UNIOGBIS provided strategic and technical advice and support in the process leading to the creation, on 5 April, of the Bissau-Guinean Women's Council, an inclusive group of women aiming to promote women's participation in national peacebuilding, reconciliation and political processes. Composed of 25 women representing civil society, political parties and the private sector from Bissau and the regions, the Council emanated from the former Women's Facilitation Group, which had succeeded in facilitating direct dialogue between protagonists to the political impasse in July 2017.

66. On 25 May, the Women's Council, with technical and financial support from UNIOGBIS through the Peacebuilding Fund, organized the first National Forum of Women and Girls for Peace in Bissau. The event brought together approximately 800 women to make concrete recommendations to political stakeholders on issues affecting efforts to sustain peace in Guinea-Bissau. In preparation for the National Forum, the Women's Council held a series of smaller conferences in all regions, which served to disseminate messages about the need for social cohesion and to gather the views of women and youth on the impact of the political impasse on their lives.

67. The views were presented at the National Forum to representatives of the Government, international partners and the United Nations, including my Senior Adviser on Policy. The process of consultations and preparations for the event helped to legitimize the Women's Council as a nationally grown peacebuilding network and to bring the voices of women and youth from across the country to decision-makers in the capital.

68. On 7 June, with continued support from UNIOGBIS, the Women's Council adopted the outcome document of the regional conferences and the National Forum. The document captures the Women's Council's agreed modalities of engagement in both a national round table, to be organized by the Government to produce an inclusive stability pact, and in the promotion of women's participation in the upcoming legislative elections.

69. From May to July, UNIOGBIS, in collaboration with the United Nations country team and its gender theme group led by UN-Women, provided support to a women's political platform to revive efforts to adopt a law on gender parity quotas for legislative and administrative elections. In that regard, UNIOGBIS provided technical advice in the creation of an advocacy committee consisting of representatives of women's groups that is reviewing an existing draft proposal for submission to the National Assembly before the next legislative elections.

H. Mobilization, harmonization and coordination of international assistance

70. On 19 and 20 March, and on 9 and 10 July, UNIOGBIS, UNDP and the European Union undertook joint missions to Dakar to mobilize resources for the legislative elections. In separate consultations with non-resident embassies accredited to Guinea-Bissau and at round-table consultations with bilateral partners, UNIOGBIS and the European Union underscored the urgency of securing resources to enable the electoral cartography and voter registration updates.

71. While the Government and UNDP have provided an initial contribution of $1.8 million and $200,000, respectively, towards the $7.7 million needed for the elections support project agreed between the previous Government and the United Nations, a funding gap of $5.7 million remains. Even taking into account the additional commitments made by the European Union (€2.5 million), Japan ($1 million), Italy (€100,000) and the Government ($500,000), there would still be an outstanding gap of $1.2 million. Moreover, the amounts committed may not be available before September, and the currently available funds are sufficient only to purchase voter registration equipment and software, but not to fund the entire operation. The Government has requested UNDP to proceed with the procurement of voter registration equipment, and has made parallel equipment loan requests to Angola, Nigeria, Portugal and Timor-Leste to enable the immediate start of voter registration. Those demarches have so far not been successful.

IV. Cross-cutting issues

A. Integration of the United Nations system

72. The Mission and the United Nations country team worked with Government counterparts to complete and endorse the 2016 and 2017 progress reports with respect to the United Nations Peacebuilding Assistance Framework (2016–2020) and to prepare joint workplans for 2018. UNIOGBIS and the United Nations country team produced a partnership and resource mobilization strategy, with a view to engaging in strategic and coherent fundraising to cover the remaining 65 per cent funding gap in the Framework's budget.

73. The human rights working group established under the United Nations Peacebuilding Assistance Framework was reactivated during the reporting period. The group serves as a platform for sharing information on key human rights policies with the United Nations country team and national partners.

74. UNIOGBIS and the United Nations country team continued to implement six projects funded by the Peacebuilding Fund, to advance efforts to promote political dialogue and national reconciliation, to strengthen the media and the justice sectors, to enhance the participation of women and youth in the political life of the country and to strengthen the leadership skills of rural youth groups to act as peacebuilders.

B. Strategic communication and public information

75. UNIOGBIS continued to raise awareness on aspects of the work and mandate of the United Nations in Guinea-Bissau, including the good offices of my Special Representative and the activities of the United Nations country team, through a variety of media, including press releases, articles, social media posts, radio programmes and an external newsletter.

76. From 15 April to 22 June, UNIOGBIS held the third edition of its community outreach programme on citizenship. The programme, which consisted of community discussions and film screenings, raised awareness among more than 6,000 persons, including 2,000 women, in 40 locations across the country on issues relating to the implementation of the UNIOGBIS mandate. The events also served as an opportunity to distribute more than 4,000 copies of an illustrated handbook on citizens' constitutional rights.

77. UNIOGBIS, with support from the Peacebuilding Fund, intensified efforts to promote the independence of the media by strengthening the capacity of journalists and media professionals and associations with a view to the upcoming elections. In that regard, UNIOGBIS provided training on the ethical coverage of elections to a total of 100 journalists, including 10 women, on 19 and 20 March and from 10 to 12 May. The Mission also provided technical support towards strengthening the governance organs of media associations, including in the revision of relevant statutes, and is contributing to a revision of the legal framework for the media sector.

C. Staff safety and security

78. The overall security situation for United Nations personnel in Guinea-Bissau remained stable. Despite a reported increase in common crime, security and criminal incidents rarely affected United Nations personnel.

V. Temporary internal recalibration of the Mission

79. UNIOGBIS is in the process of realigning its work in accordance with its revised mandate under Security Council resolution 2404 (2018). The Mission's temporary recalibration conforms to the recommendations of a technical assessment mission led by the Department of Political Affairs in late March for that purpose, and also reflects the recommendations of the strategic review mission of December 2016. Following the abrogation by the Security Council of the core tasks of UNIOGBIS in the field of rule of law and security institutions, the Mission temporarily reconfigured staffing arrangements to focus on delivery under its three mandated priorities. Staff from the former rule of law and security institutions section are working in three clusters for the remainder of 2018: (a) political affairs and good offices; (b) human rights and gender; and (c) combating drug trafficking and transnational organized crime. Their temporary reassignment was warranted by the increased responsibilities of the political affairs component of the Mission engendered by the electoral process, and the need to strengthen the Mission's regional offices in that regard and to handle related demands.

80. Pursuant to resolution 2404 (2018), the Mission retained the mandated task of providing strategic and technical advice and support to the Government of Guinea-Bissau to combat drug trafficking and transnational organized crime, in close cooperation with UNODC. UNIOGBIS temporarily formed a dedicated unit for combatting drug trafficking and transnational organized crime, drawing from existing resources in its current budget. The unit has continued existing Mission activities to

provide strategic and technical support to State institutions in combating drug trafficking and transnational organized crime.

81. The Secretariat will be proposing a revised budget for UNIOGBIS for 2019, to be considered by the General Assembly during its seventy-third session, that closely reflects the revised mandate under resolution 2404 (2018). The temporary recalibration of the Mission and its budget proposal for 2019 were undertaken without prejudice to recommendations arising from the planned strategic assessment of the Mission. The latter will include options for a possible reconfiguration of the United Nations presence in the country and the reprioritization of tasks, which I will submit to the Security Council in November, and on which the Council is expected to pronounce itself in February 2019, when the renewal of the mandate of UNIOGBIS will be under consideration.

VI. Observations

82. I remain concerned about the situation in Guinea-Bissau, despite the encouraging progress achieved earlier in 2018 towards a solution to the country's longstanding political and institutional stalemate. The appointment of a Prime Minister of consensus, the formation of an inclusive Government and the resumption of the full functioning of the National Assembly have provided reason for new resolve after three years of gridlock. Those developments also represent the fulfilment of three key steps towards the full implementation of the Conakry Agreement. I laud in particular the efforts undertaken by religious leaders and civil society organizations to facilitate a rapprochement between the national political actors. All national stakeholders, including political parties, the President, the Prime Minister, the President of the National Assembly and the leaders of PAIGC and PRS, need to continue constructive dialogue to resolve their differences and move forward with the full implementation of the ECOWAS road map and the Conakry Agreement. I reiterate the commitment of the United Nations to support their efforts in that regard.

83. The sustained efforts by ECOWAS to mediate a solution to the political stalemate and to support national actors in fully implementing the Conakry Agreement have remained indispensable. I encourage the monitoring committee comprising the ECOWAS Mediator for Guinea-Bissau, President Condé of Guinea, the new Chairperson of the ECOWAS Authority, President Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria, and the President of the ECOWAS Commission, Jean-Claude Kassi Brou, to continue to support Bissau-Guineans in fully implementing the Agreement and the ECOWAS road map. The United Nations supports the efforts of ECOWAS, in close cooperation with the African Union, the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries and European Union partners.

84. Most concerning are the increasing delays and the persistent lack of clarity and accountability in the preparations for the holding of legislative elections in 2018. As the focus of national politics is now on the legislative and presidential elections, their timely and credible conduct in 2018 and 2019, respectively, is the crucial next step towards a resumption of sustainable peacebuilding. The elections must be held in accordance with the Constitution and national laws and commitments. I call upon the Prime Minister and national authorities to provide firm political direction for the electoral process, to expedite the required technical preparations and to empower the electoral management bodies to implement the soundest solutions for the holding of timely and credible elections. The United Nations will continue to assist wherever possible to support the resolve of national partners, including with respect to technical preparations and the mobilization of the required resources.

85. With respect to the mobilization of the resources required for the timely holding of legislative elections, I strongly encourage donors to help to fill the financial gap in the electoral assistance project. The national stakeholders in Guinea-Bissau have already disbursed an unprecedented $1.8 million towards the elections, and have pledged an additional $500,000.

86. Constitutional review remains an important avenue to preventing a recurrence of political and institutional stalemate after the elections. The electoral challenges are indeed testimony to the limited sustainability of the current inclusive Government and its institutional framework. The holding of legislative elections must therefore have the highest priority, as little progress on the peacebuilding priorities of Guinea-Bissau can be expected prior to a new political dispensation being put into place. Nevertheless, I call upon all national stakeholders to simultaneously gauge their availability to expedite and complete the review of the country's Constitution at the earliest convenience, in respect for full national ownership. The time between legislative elections in 2018 and presidential polls in 2019 could offer an opportunity to expedite the review of the Constitution, provided that legislative elections are held in a timely manner and a sense of urgency for constitutional reform can be instilled among the political actors in Guinea-Bissau.

87. Against that backdrop, UNIOGBIS has swiftly moved to focus its activities on its revised mandate, in particular with respect to supporting the electoral process to ensure the holding of legislative elections in 2018. I commend the Mission's efforts to temporarily realign its staff and to make effective and efficient use of its existing resources to ensure mandate delivery in this key moment for the political process in the country. I count on the support of Security Council members and other international partners as I prepare my upcoming strategic assessment, which will inform the options I provide to the Security Council in November with respect to a possible reconfiguration of the United Nations presence in Guinea-Bissau and a reprioritization of tasks.

88. National authorities have taken some steps towards ensuring greater respect for the right of freedom of assembly. However, many obstacles remain to ensuring that all members of society, especially women and youth, can fully exercise their right to political participation. I call upon the State to take immediate measures to address the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination in the country. With specific regard to the upcoming legislative and presidential elections, the authorities should make it a priority to take any measures that promote the active participation of women as voters and candidates in both polls.

89. Respect for human rights is an essential prerequisite for stability, peace and sustainable development in Guinea-Bissau. The formalization of the National Network of Human Rights Defenders is a positive step, and I invite the international community to support the Network. The establishment of an independent national human rights institution, in compliance with the Paris Principles, and an effective interministerial commission on human rights to follow up on and implement recommendations from regional and international human rights mechanisms, should remain a central goal for Guinea-Bissau.

90. I take note of the professionalism displayed by the armed forces through their continued non-interference in national politics and judicial affairs, and their discharge of duties in accordance with their constitutionally mandated role. In the electoral context, the extension of ECOMIB remains an important factor in ensuring stability, and Member States should be encouraged to provide the financial and military support required for its continued operation.

91. Drug trafficking and transnational organized crime are threats to peace and stability in Guinea-Bissau, the subregion and beyond. Addressing those challenges

requires multifaceted and cross-sectoral approaches at the national and regional levels. I call upon Member States to provide the resources necessary to enable UNODC to enhance its presence in the country and support the authorities in implementing comprehensive and people-centred responses to drug and human trafficking and transnational organized crime.

92. In conclusion, I wish to express my appreciation to my Special Representative, José Viegas Filho, the Mission staff and the United Nations country team for their dedication. I am also grateful to my former Special Representative, Modibo Touré, for his able and dedicated leadership, and for the accomplishments of the Mission during his tenure at UNIOGBIS.